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“Teaching Political Communication”

Letter from the Editor: Navigating Challenges and Opportunities in Teaching Political Communication¹

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Teaching constitutes a fundamental element of the academic profession. The process of mentoring new students facilitates the transfer of theoretical knowledge, methodological approaches, and empirical findings from more experienced faculty members to new students. It is hoped that many of the students will be sufficiently motivated and passionate about the field to also find beauty in academia and choose to pursue this path. We, as lecturers, can foster the interest of younger generations in research, nurturing their potential to contribute to the advancement of knowledge in our field. Even in the absence of academic fervor among students, they nevertheless constitute the future of the professional workforce. It is to be hoped that these individuals will embody qualities of critical thinking, political awareness, and a commitment to societal improvement.

As lecturers of political communication, we are entrusted with the dual role of cultivating both future rigorous scholars and critical professionals. Through the subjects we teach, we are empowered to guide students in critically evaluating various aspects of society. As future communication professionals, they should understand the ways in which communication tools (such as visuals and word choices) are used both to inform and disinform citizens. In addition, they should also understand how new technologies shape politics and how such technologies are used by political figures to frame issues and affect public perceptions.

Our hope is that this critical evaluation will enable them to challenge many of the patterns we observe. They may come to understand how language is infused with ideology and how subtle linguistic choices can shape perceptions in powerful ways. In this regard, we are also responsible for teaching the democratic standards we hold dear in our theoretical backgrounds.

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We have the responsibility to resist autocratic advances and the decline of academic freedom. This issue of the Political Communication Report opens with an exploration the role of universities in resisting, with the essay “Teach-Ins: Pedagogical Resistance and American Democracy” (White, 2025). This essay traces back the historical trajectory of teach-ins in American universities, emphasizing their function in fostering political discourse, denouncing institutional silence, disseminating information to a wide audience, and opposing injustice.

To achieve such critical thinking about the different aspects that our field is concerned with, the teaching of our theories, methods, and empirical examinations is fundamental. However, teaching political communication is an opportunity that comes with many challenges. The next essay, “Teaching Political Communication: Five Lessons From the Field and Beyond” (Coe & Zulli, 2025), traces some of these challenges and lessons learned. For example, the field of political communication moves fast, with technological advancements dramatically changing the ways political information is shared. Reflecting on different challenges, Coe & Zulli (2025) identify five major lessons outlined in their forthcoming book *Teaching Political Communication*.

Another fundamental aspect of our field is its international dimension. Comparison is often one of the central approaches used to test hypotheses, with the aim of generalizing our findings to different contexts. However, comparative studies in our field are challenged by frameworks that often fit one context but fail to apply to another. This issue further examines this challenge with the essay “Comparative Studies: Epistemological and Pedagogical Reflections” (Cazzamatta, 2025). In this essay, Cazzamatta (2025) discusses how to teach the limitations of different typologies and how to reflect with students on the methodological problems that arise when Western frameworks are applied to non-Western contexts.

Alongside the comparative dimension of political communication, methodological pluralism is another crucial pedagogical challenge. Our field often favors quantitative methods over qualitative approaches, and this problem has been previously discussed in an earlier issue of PCR (see Gagrčin & Butkowsk, 2023). However, if we want to equip our students with a holistic overview of the field, it is essential to also teach them qualitative methods. In this issue, the essay “Qualitative Methods Beyond the Recipe Book: Teaching How to Conduct Interviews” (Powers, 2025) explores the challenges of teaching qualitative methods. Powers (2025) emphasizes that qualitative methods go beyond a recipe book. For example, while conducting interviews, researchers often face unexpected encounters that defy their initial expectations, definitions, and typologies. Powers (2025) shows that, when teaching qualitative methods, lecturers should move their teaching beyond the recipe book approach of merely following steps without encouraging deeper reflection.

The different essays in this issue show that teaching political communication should involve students in the teaching process. To this end, an important approach is to rethink the model of

teaching in which lecturers are seen as possessing some kind of hierarchical authority over learning to a model that involves students in dialogue and making them active participants in the learning process. A great example of this is shown in “Navigating the Algorithm: Active Learning in Political Communication” (Kim et al., 2025). In this essay, Kim partnered with her students to reflect on their experience of a joint research project exploring YouTube’s algorithmic recommendations. The essay demonstrates how teaching can embrace active and experiential approaches to reflect on the complex phenomena with which our field engages.

As part of this issue, we also present a new resource from our division in the essay “The Political Communication Teaching Database: A Resource for Pedagogical Inspiration and Innovation” (Bossetta & Gonçalves, 2025). This essay demonstrates the database’s functionality, including how to upload and search for materials. Finally, it serves as an invitation to contribute to the database by sharing your own materials using [this form](#).

Finally, this issue also features the Awardee Interviews section. In this edition, three award winners are presented: the Kaid-Sanders Best Political Communication Article of the Year Award, awarded to Nicolai Berk; the 2025 International Journal of Press/Politics Hazel Gaudet-Erskine Best Book Award, awarded to Benjamin Toff, Ruth Palmer, and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen; and the ICA Political Communication PhD Dissertation Award, awarded to Meagan Doll.

Our field is full of challenges that can be transformed into opportunities for teaching. Yet, we often fail to discuss the pedagogy of teaching political communication and how to improve our methods. This issue of PCR is an opportunity to foster reflection and bring greater attention to this important matter. I hope it contributes to advancing our reflection on how to teach political communication more effectively. Happy reading!

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